Saskatchewan
Environment
and Resource
Management

Clarence-Steepbank Lakes Provincial Park

September 1994

SASKATCHEWAN PARKS
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Clarence Steepbank Lakes Provincial Wilderness Park

Public Information Document

Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management
September, 1994

Foreword

On June 2, 1994, the Clarence-Steepbank lakes area was officially declared a provincial wilderness park.

This public information document is based on information from a background report, which was written in 1993 in response to a strong public interest concerning the designation of the Clarence-Steepbank lakes wilderness area as a provincial wilderness park.

The support and contributions of various groups toward understanding and protecting the Clarence-Steepbank lakes area is recognized. The preservation of this special place by the Saskatchewan legislature will benefit generations to follow.

Special thanks are extended to Hal Miller, a department employee, who was the main author of the background report and who was killed in a tragic accident on December 7, 1993. This public information document is dedicated to his memory.

The following description of the area was written by Hal Miller as an introduction to the background report.

Dedication to Hal Miller

The Clarence-Steepbank lakes area is a wild space in Saskatchewan's boreal forest. Pristine forests, a chain of lakes, streams and a steep undulating landscape are natural features of this land which provide foundations for its character. It is in some ways mysterious; it has strength and it features tranquillity. The Clarence-Steepbank lakes area is wild country with its own identity.

Unlike the surrounding areas, this country is relatively free of development. Clearcuts and fire-killed timber are non-existent. The absence of man-made disturbances makes this still a genuine wilderness. Here, forests have matured to climax stages of succession. This forest environment provides critical habitat for a specific community of living things.

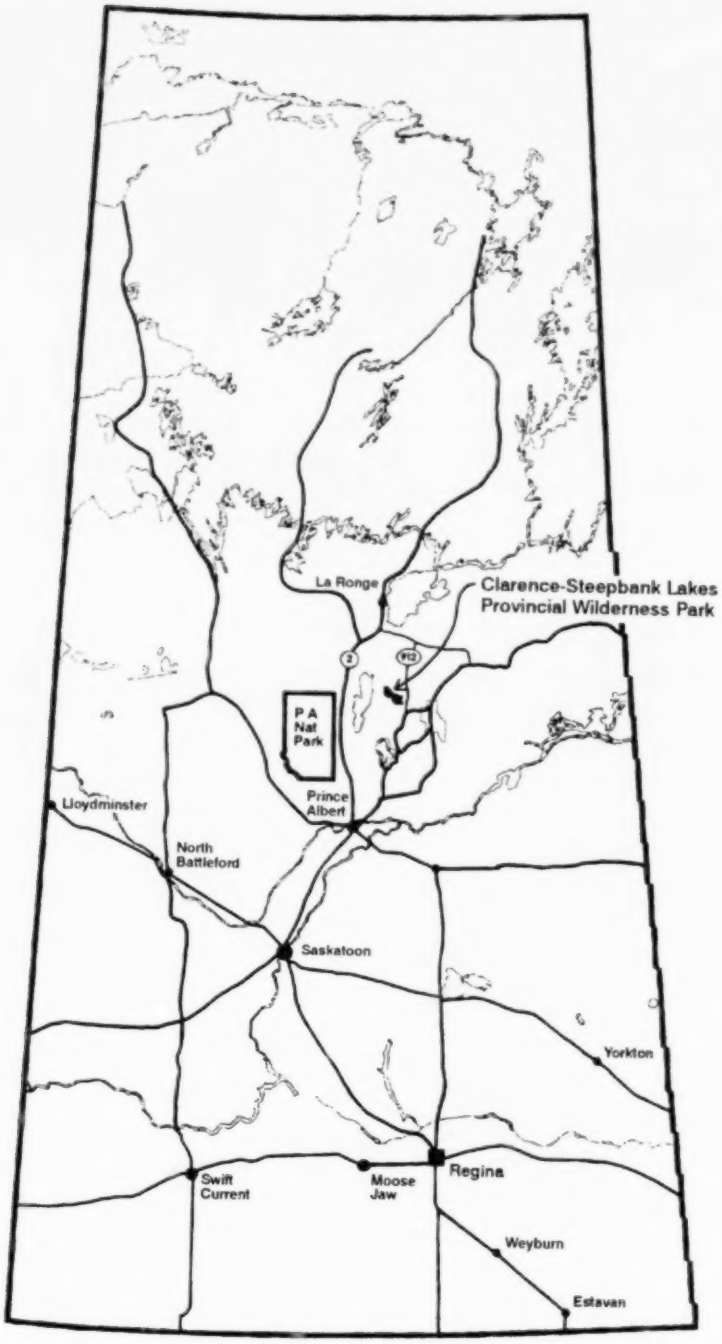
Beyond the mature forest, there are also many other types of wild environments. They provide habitat for a diversity of plants and animals. The presence of various soil types, a landscape that is steeply sloped to undulating, and the presence of water systems are all reasons why such a wide variety of environments do exist. Nothing present seems to be out of place here. There is variety here, yet it all fits together. Conflict is absent. Tranquillity is present.

This country's mysterious qualities originate from knowledge that suggests little is known about its cultural past, and that rare plant varieties may exist. Many of the area's intricate environmental relationships are yet to be discovered.

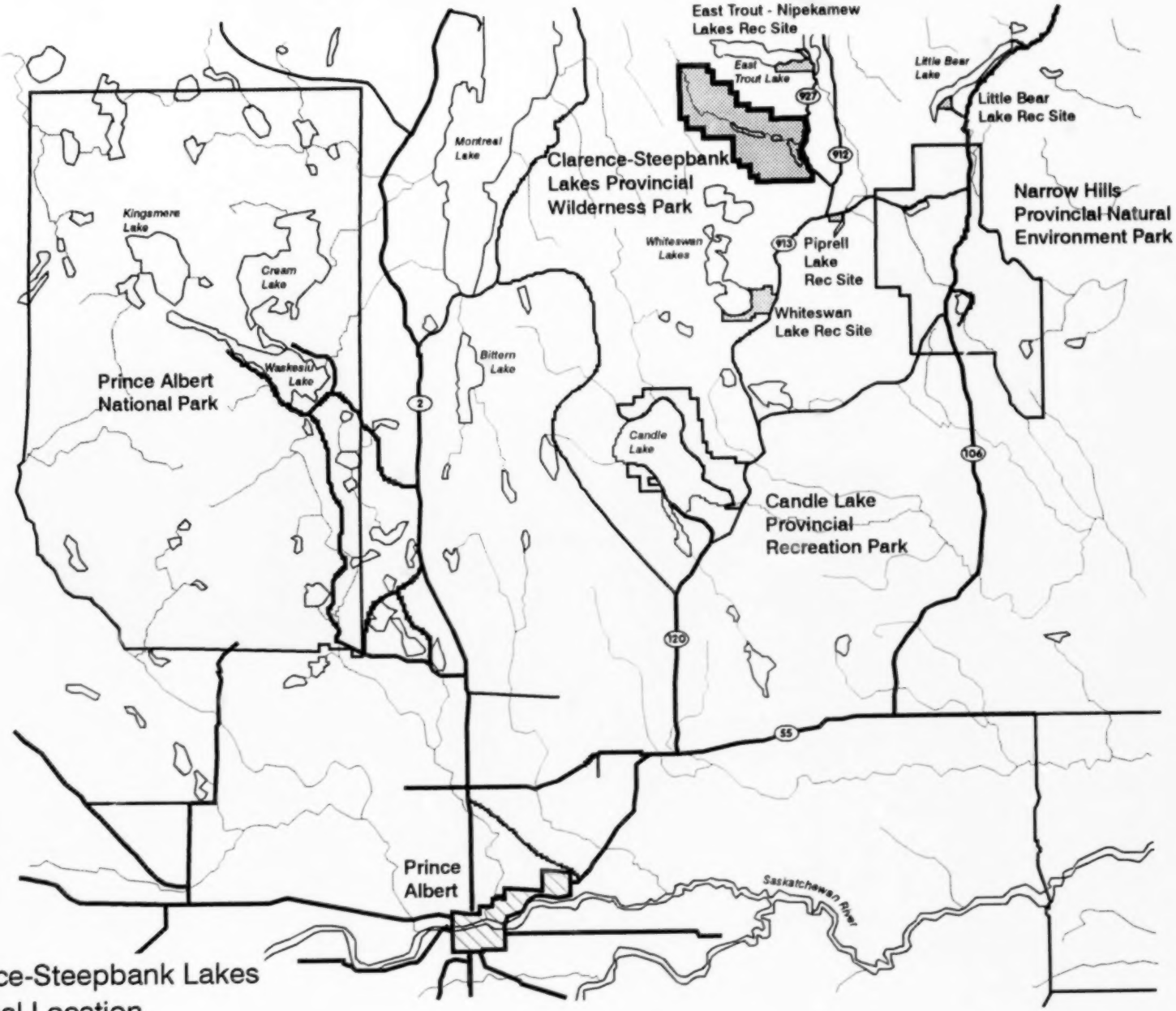
Strength is quite apparent to those who view its steeply sloped landscape. The presence of large mature spruce provide one with a similar sensation. Strength in a more subtle form exists in balanced relationships found among the various natural systems and communities that are present. These relationships have long-term stability and are therefore self-sustaining. Strong when they are together, those systems, if fragmented, can lose that strength. Once country is developed, it can never return to wilderness. The Clarence-Steepbank lakes area is a wilderness now, but if developed, it will never be again.

Many local citizens, conservation enthusiasts and recreationalists, have now had access and have become aware of this wilderness area. Each values this area, many for the reasons suggested. These people share the opinion that economic values should not always be the overriding principle that controls land use decisions. They support an ethic that views land as a common property, and that it is wrong to use land in a way that disrupts its present state when other alternatives are available. The Clarence-Steepbank lakes area is a wild space that should be left in place.

by Hal Miller, July 1993 - excerpt from "Clarence Steepbank Lakes - A Proposed Provincial Wilderness Park"



Clarence-Steepbank Lakes
Provincial Location



Clarence-Steepbank Lakes
Regional Location

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Introduction

The Clarence-Steepbank Lakes Provincial Park is Saskatchewan's fourth wilderness park. It encloses 17,549 hectares of relatively pristine landscape, mature forest, lakes and wilderness. Its significance has been recognized since at least the early 1970s.

It is located between Whiteswan Lake and East Trout Lake about 150 kilometres northeast of Prince Albert. Its access road runs west of highway 927 and approximately 12 kilometres north from highway 913. Other parks in this area include Narrow Hills and Candle Lake provincial parks, Whiteswan Lake and East Trout-Nipekamew lakes recreation sites, and Prince Albert National Park.

Parks System

In 1990, the Parks System Plan, detailing the future direction of Saskatchewan's parks system, was released to the public. The key principles of the plan were to protect representative samples of all Saskatchewan's natural and cultural resources and to provide equal access to recreation for everyone. The main focus of the plan since that time has been to increase the amount of land protected in under-represented ecoregions and zones. The Clarence-Steepbank Lakes Provincial Wilderness Park protects land in the Southern Boreal Region, Wapawekka Uplands Natural Zone, and provides wilderness recreation opportunities.

Provincial wilderness parks are a fairly recent provision in Saskatchewan's park classification system. The general intention of this classification is for the preservation of natural landscapes in a natural state and the pursuit of outdoor recreational activities that are consistent with that use.

Forest and Landscape

The Clarence-Steepbank Lakes Provincial Park is located within the southern boreal forest. The forest has a high proportion of old-growth stands. The heavily dissected topography has created a diversity of environments and, in the absence of fire, has given rise to a high proportion of old stands dominated by large trees. Old forest ecosystems are found throughout the park.

All of the species combinations of tree cover common to the southern boreal forest occur here, but with a relatively high proportion of stands dominated by conifers. Species include white spruce, jack pine, black spruce, tamarack, balsam poplar, balsam fir, aspen, and white birch. Old-growth forests support a different complement of plant species (i.e., probably more orchids and fern species) than younger forests.

The many streams and lakes create a range of moisture conditions capable of supporting a rich flora. Water flowing into the valley and lake system originates in the extensive fens and bogs that surround the park on the north, south and east. The broad range of aquatic plants expected in the boreal forest are likely present because of the occurrence of both running and still waters as well as acid (e.g., bog) and more basic (e.g., pond) water conditions.

The area has outstanding potential as habitat for a large number of rare plants. Dr. Vern Harms; Fraser Herbarium, University of Saskatchewan and Rob Wright, forest ecologist, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management discovered several provincially rare plants while conducting a floristic inventory during the summer of 1993:

- Northern Twayblade (*Listera borealis*)
- Adder's-mouth (*Malaxis monophyllus* var. *brachypoda*)
- Alpine or Northern Bistort (*Polygonum viviparum*)
- Clasping-leaved Twisted-stalk (*Streptopus amplexifolius*)

They also discovered two provincially semi-rare plants, which include:

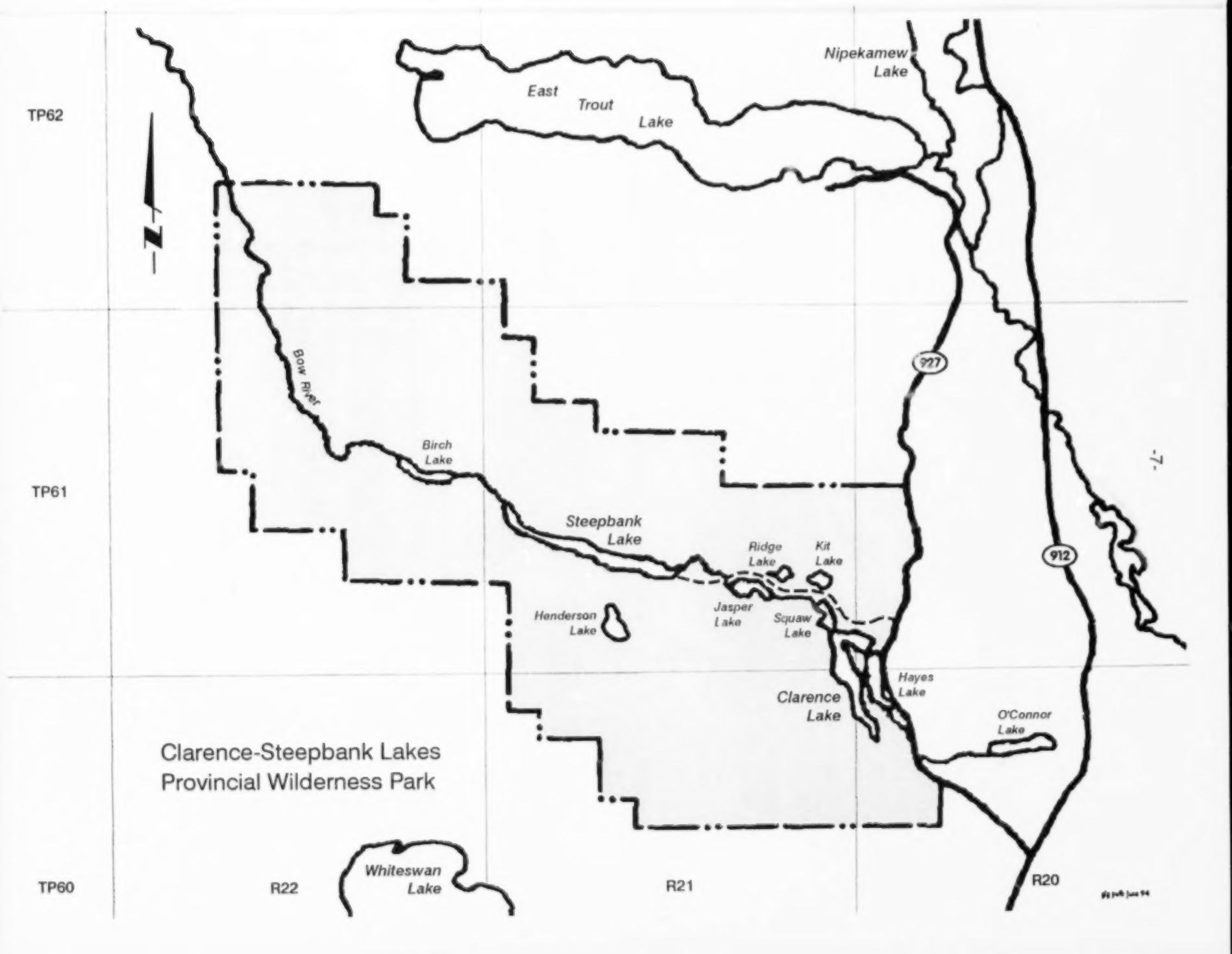
- Heart-leaved Twayblade (*Listera cordata*)
- Large Round-leaved Bog Orchid (*Platanthera orbiculata*)

Fish and Wildlife

The presence of very large trees make mature old growth forests excellent habitat for a wide variety of bird species. Many of the large forest birds - barred owls, goshawks, bald eagles, and pileated woodpeckers - require large-diameter trees for nesting. Mature and old forests are also important habitat for many small songbirds. Research has shown that both the number of species and species diversity increase as the age of the forest increases. Older forests also contain trees of many different ages and sizes, producing many layers or niches for different species of birds.

Bird species commonly found in old growth forests are barred owl, boreal owl, northern goshawk, pileated woodpecker, golden-crowned kinglet, brown creeper, Cape May warbler, black-throated green warbler, blackburnian warbler, bay-breasted warbler, western tanager, purple finch, winter wren, evening grosbeak, and rose-breasted grosbeak.

Mammals that typically use old growth forests include the martin, fisher, woodland caribou, northern flying squirrel, red-backed vole, hoary bat, red bat, deer mouse and red squirrel.


TP62
TP61
TP60
R22
R21
R20
East
Trout
Lake
Nipekamew
Lake
Bow River
Birch
Lake
Steepbank
Lake
Ridge
Lake
Kit
Lake
Henderson
Lake
Jasper
Lake
Squaw
Lake
Hayes
Lake
Clarence
Lake
O'Connor
Lake
Whiteswan
Lake
927
912
Clarence-Steepbank Lakes
Provincial Wilderness Park

Eight lakes situated within the reserve are known to have active fish populations. These include Steepbank, Birch, Kit, Jasper, Clarence, Hayes, Ridge and Squaw lakes. The majority of these lakes are all located within a 50 meter walking distance of main access roads. Birch Lake is the only lake where access is restricted.

Native species that occur in most of the lakes include pike, sucker, cisco and perch. The following lists species of fish for each lake:

- Steepbank Lake - populations of pike, cisco and two species of sucker. Lake trout have been stocked with limited success, and walleye, with good success.
- Birch Lake - lake trout and pike populations
- Kit Lake - the only lake stocked with rainbow trout
- Ridge Lake - stocked with brook trout
- Jasper Lake - fair pike population, high sucker populations and some perch and cisco
- Clarence Lake - good pike, cisco and sucker populations, with some perch and stocked walleye
- Hayes Lake - pike and perch.
- Squaw Lake - pike, sucker, cisco and perch

Recreational Uses

The most common recreational uses of this area are picnicking, camping and fishing. Use is highest at Clarence and Steepbank lakes, which have limited recreational facilities, such as a few tables, barbecues and toilets. Primitive camping areas are available at several lakes. Access within the park is provided via good quality sand and gravel roads which provide vehicle access up to Steepbank Lake. From there one can only gain access to the west end of the park by boat/canoe or hiking.

Anglers have a choice of at least eight different lakes as well as a selection of five different species of game fish. Sand/gravel access roads and walking trails provide access to all eight lakes. In the majority of cases, fishermen or other boaters are restricted to the use of small boats and motors or canoes. There are no cement pads for launching and access to the lakeshore is limited.

Other recreational uses such as hiking, hunting, sight seeing, canoeing and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use also occur. A walking/hiking trail was established several years ago along the south side of Steepbank Lake and it provides access to the west end of Steepbank Lake and Birch Lake.

Existing recreational uses will be allowed to continue as long as they do not destroy park values. In keeping with the management objectives of a provincial wilderness park, there will not be any major improvements in the recreation facilities in the park. A park management strategy needs to be prepared to guide development and future uses within the park.

Resource Uses

Limited hunting and trapping occurs within the park. Such resource uses will be allowed to continue as long as they do not destroy park values. As well, traditional resource uses by Treaty Indians, such as fishing, hunting and trapping, will be allowed to continue as per Treaty rights.

Existing mineral claims which are in the park will be honored and vegetation will be managed according to a vegetation management plan which has to be prepared.

Regional Benefits

Aside from the benefits of preserving the land in a natural state and having a healthy environment, there are economic benefits from the establishment of the park. With scientists, environmentalists and wilderness-seekers visiting the area, there will be increased demand for services in such places as Candle Lake, Smeaton, East Trout Lake and Whiteswan Lake.

As well, the establishment of a provincial wilderness park now provides a wide range of opportunities and experiences for tourists and visitors to the area north of Prince Albert, i.e.,

- recreation and resort facilities at Emma Lake,
- Candle Lake Provincial Park,
- natural environment experiences at Narrow Hills Provincial Park,
- recreation sites and resorts,
- Prince Albert National Park, and
- wilderness recreation experiences at Clarence-Steepbank Lakes Provincial Park.

Future Requirements

Activities necessary to maximize potential benefits to Saskatchewan people now that the area is a provincial wilderness park include the following:

- Provide proper signing to and within the park.
- Expand knowledge base in regards to existing plant and animal life by conducting inventories.
- Conduct research on the history and culture of the area.
- Prepare a park management strategy to guide management and development of the park, which would address issues like hiking trails, canoe route possibilities, marketing, etc.
- Prepare a vegetation management plan for the park.